



ROBERT GARDNER

A N D

THE SCOTTISH INSURRECTION OF 1820

By Linda Gessel Grow
Great-Great-Great-Granddaughter
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INTRODUCTION

On September 2, 2014, the 200th birthday of Archibald Gardner, my husband Robert J. Grow and I were on our way to Stirling, Stirlingshire, Scotland. We had already spent several days tracking down the Gardner family places in Houston, Kilmacolm and Kilsyth. Today, however, in honor of this notable occasion, we decided to explore Stirling Castle utilizing Robert's gifted sleuthing skills once again to see what more we could learn about the imprisonment there of Archibald Gardner's father Robert Gardner, which is briefly described in Archibald's biography. I had hoped for sunshine, but the clouds filling the sky were low and gray, evocative of the gloom that surely enveloped Robert Gardner, his wife and children, and his aged parents during his most challenging, uncertain, and soul-searching time in Scotland. The major turning point in Robert Gardner's life was his decision to leave his homeland of Scotland and immigrate to Canada, a decision that would drastically alter the lives of his children, his grandchildren, and his entire posterity. This is the story behind that decision.

Historians refer to the events that occurred in the spring of 1820 in Scotland as the "Radical War" or the "Scottish Insurrection of 1820." Only two paragraphs in *The Life of Archibald Gardner* recount these events, yet the facts as presented have proven to be exceptionally accurate. (Archibald's own words are in **bold type** throughout this history.) For 150 years, the story of this last armed struggle for Scottish independence slipped into obscurity, but the story was "rediscovered" in Scotland about 1970 and much has been written since about the historical significance of what occurred. Robert Gardner was swept up in the circumstances surrounding this "insurrection" and could have been convicted of treason, been hanged and beheaded, or banished to the Botany Bay penal colony in Australia along with other prisoners. It is interesting to note that these events occurred in the spring of 1820, the same time frame in which Joseph Smith received his First Vision leading to the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also interesting to note that Robert Gardner was peripherally part of the last armed insurrection aimed at obtaining Scottish independence and on September 18, 2014, almost 200 years later, the Scottish people will vote on whether to stay in the United Kingdom or become a separate nation. [The Scots voted not to become a separate country.]

According to Archibald's biography, **"Times were poor, business dull, and people became dissatisfied with the government."** In 1820, Robert Gardner and his growing family were living in Kilsyth, where Archibald was born. Robert was obviously a hard worker with an entrepreneurial spirit. He had leased the Garrell Mill, which ground grain such as oats and corn, from the Forth and Clyde Canal Company; he was the proprietor of a tavern and inn, perhaps known as the Kilsyth Inn; and he also worked a farm.

The hills of Scotland, as well as its neighbors, are dotted everywhere with sheep. The production of wool was one of the staples of Scottish life, but the first industry to develop in Kilsyth was the manufacture of linen and eventually other types of textiles. Many of the men living in Kilsyth were weavers who wove cloth on hand looms in their homes. They picked up supplies from Glasgow, about 12 miles away, and returned their completed work to Glasgow to be sold, carrying everything on their backs. [In 1796, out of a total working population in Kilsyth of 919 individuals, 680 were employed in the textile industry, 400 men in weaving and 280 women in "tambouring" or stitching designs onto finished cloth.] Not only women but children helped with this home industry. The bells of the parish church would ring at 6:00 am to awaken people to begin work at their looms. The bells would sound again at 10:00 pm to signal it was time to go to bed and then again at 11:00 pm to encourage those men still at the pub to go home.

The end of the Napoleonic (or French) Wars left the Scottish economy in recession. Unemployment soared as large numbers of service men were released from the armed forces and returned home. Government contracts for uniforms, munitions, and other



Garrell Mill on Tak-Ma-Doon Road in Kilsyth



The town of Kilsyth

war-related necessities were terminated leading to more unemployment. The wages for weavers working in their homes in smaller towns or in the textile mills in the large cities were steadily going down. The weavers' wages had been cut in half in the first decade of the 1800s and continued to substantially decline through the second decade. By 1819, handloom weavers, who before the war could earn as much as 40 shillings per week, were reduced to a mere five shillings. They were on the verge of starvation. Because they could not make enough money to feed their families, there was growing unrest among the working class, including talk of "radical" reform and even Scottish independence, although most members of the Scottish unions like the Glasgow Cotton Spinners Association simply wanted higher wages that would support a decent living.

These were tumultuous times in Scotland. In 1817, the government had suspended the Habeas Corpus Act, thereby enabling political agitators to be held in jail without a trial, and restrictions had been placed on holding public meetings. "Agents provocateur" employed by the government infiltrated political societies and Radical groups, encouraged them to take extreme action, and then betrayed them to the authorities. Thus the stage was set for the "Insurrection of 1820."

By early March of 1820, talk of workers' rights and revolution resulted in a 28 man committee being elected by delegates of local unions to organize a Provisional Scottish Government in Glasgow. Military training was instituted for its supporters. A British spy (or "agent provocateur") named John King, who had infiltrated the committee, caused most of its members to be secretly arrested on March 21 and held incommunicado. On March 22, at another meeting where 15-20 men had gathered in the absence of their imprisoned leaders, infiltrators enticed the unsophisticated weavers to print and disseminate a proclamation, authored by one of the spies, which threatened to establish a provisional or new Scottish government and called for an armed rebellion against British rule and re-establishment of the ancient Scottish parliament.

On Sunday morning, April 2, 1820, the citizens of Glasgow and the surrounding countryside including Stirlingshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and Ayrshire, awoke to find proclamations prominently displayed on the walls of houses and in the streets. There was excitement and anticipation as people poured into the streets to read the document which called for the citizens of Scotland to rise up in arms. The Proclamation, signed by the "Committee of Organization for forming a Provisional Government, Glasgow, 1st April 1820," declared that the insurgents would achieve "freedom, or return home no more." They invoked the famous rallying cry, "Liberty or Death!" The British government's prime objective all along was to quickly squash this Scottish independence movement by covertly inciting the leadership of the protests to take specific actions against the government which would make it possible for the leaders to be arrested and tried for treason. With the proclamation printed and distributed by unsuspecting, enthusiastic Radicals, the Government spies had laid their plot well. The Radicals were ready to seize the bait and come out into the open.

Archibald briefly describes how these very complex military and political circumstances were affecting life in Kilsyth, recalling that "**Meetings were held by agitators even privately in our own tavern**" [in Kilsyth]. And "**Skirmish after skirmish took place.**"

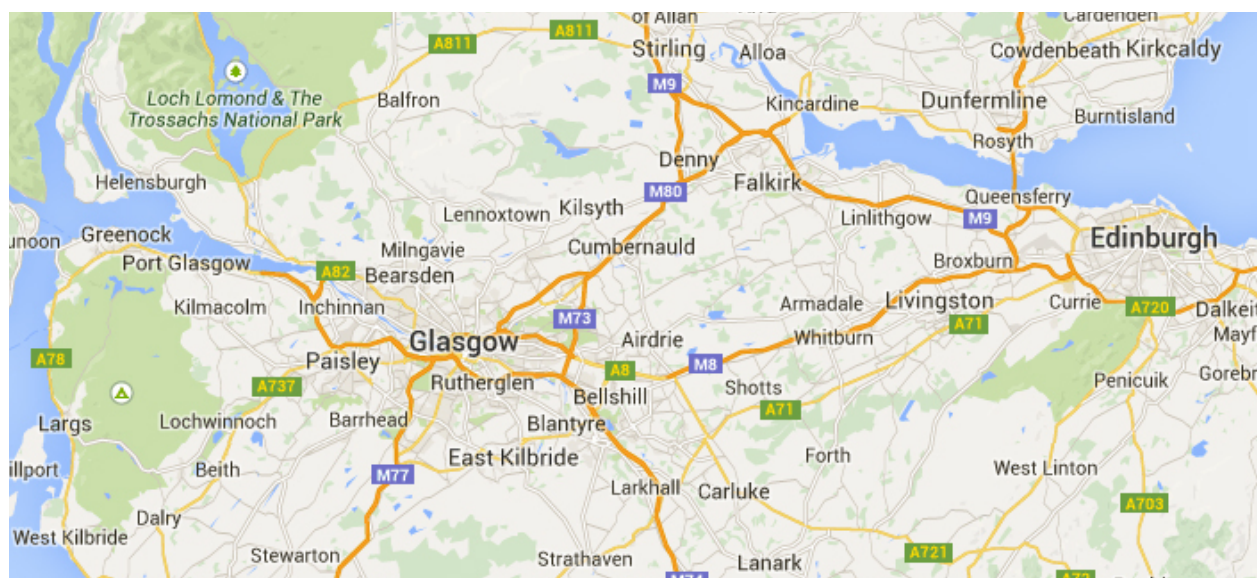
The following morning on Monday, April 3, 1820, work stopped, particularly in the weaving communities across western and central Scotland, including Stirlingshire (where Kilsyth was located) and the neighboring counties of Dumbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. Also throughout this area, a number of skirmishes between the military and militia, on one hand, and armed protesters on the other hand, occurred in several communities. The work stoppage or strike involved as many as 60,000 workers. Rumors were circulating, promulgated by

the spies, that an army of 50,000 French soldiers would immediately intervene to support a Scottish insurrection against British rule. It is clear to historians in hindsight that much of this so-called “insurrection” was orchestrated by British infiltrators, who first inflamed the participants and then betrayed them.

Many Scots, however, had become convinced that the only way to improve their situation was to separate themselves from England by declaring Scottish independence. The British government and its supporters feared that a revolution like those that had been successful in America and more recently in France would now occur in Scotland as well. At this time, large contingents of regular army troops and cavalry were already stationed in both Glasgow in the west and Perth in the east. In addition, the armed militia cavalymen known as Yeomen had been called up throughout central Scotland to crush the independence movement.

One group of Yeomen cavalry known as the Stirlingshire Yeomen had a company of troops based in Kilsyth under the leadership of Captain John James Davidson, who used the Kilsyth Inn as his base of operations. Davidson, a lawyer living in Edinburgh, was also likely the “factor” or property manager of most of the land and other assets in Kilsyth owned by the “ruling” family, the Edmondstones. The Yeomen were a volunteer group of local gentry and landowners who had trained as cavalry and would have certainly opposed the strike and any rebellion against British rule. On April 2, approximately 32 of the Kilsyth Yeomen were mustered into service at Kilsyth Inn under Davidson’s command. Two days later, on April 4, they were joined by a group of regular army cavalry at Kilsyth, who were intent on forcibly ending the protest if necessary. The soldiers were likely staying at more than one inn in Kilsyth.

On Tuesday, April 4, with their leaders still imprisoned in Glasgow, a group of about 30-35 politically naive weavers and tailors set out from Glasgow towards Falkirk under the leadership of Andrew Hardie and John Baird, both weavers. The government agent named King enticed the group to move towards the ironworks at Carron in Falkirk. King assured them they could easily obtain materials to make weapons and he would arrange for them to meet with additional supporters. Throughout the entire episode, these men were manipulated by King who led them into an ambush at Bonnymuir. [Bonnymuir is about 4 miles west of Falkirk and about 8.3 miles south-southwest of Stirling.]



Location of Kilsyth, Falkirk, Stirling, Glasgow, and Edinburgh

From Archibald's recollections, it is clear that the Gardner tavern, whether it was called the Kilsyth Inn or by some other name at that time, was the scene for "radical" talk, perhaps liquor-fueled, about these serious economic and political concerns and the bold solutions being proposed, including independence for Scotland. Taverns were one of the main places where news was exchanged, and news of the day traveled quickly. William Gardner, Robert Gardner's oldest son, was 17 years of age in 1820. If he was like his forefathers, he was large in stature and had probably been doing a man's work for years. He was certainly old enough to listen with interest to the talk of rebellion. Perhaps he was sympathetic to this righteous cause or even intrigued by the lure of adventure that would surely accompany it.

It is interesting to ponder whether the Gardner family sympathies were with the English government or with the plight of the working class weavers and their desire for Scottish independence. In his own personal situation, Robert Gardner was well aware of the rule of wealth and class in Scotland and his own inability to ever own land or fully profit from his labors. At this time in the early 1800's, private property ownership remained an unachievable dream for the working class. Robert leased the inn and the farm, probably from the factor for the Edmonstone family who owned the lands of Kilsyth, and he leased the mill from the Forth and Clyde Canal Company. The Gardners witnessed the government's abuse of the working class and saw its direct impact on the families in the town of Kilsyth. The same people who could not earn a living could not buy grain from his mill.



Main Street in Kilsyth, August 2014



The Cross of Kilsyth identified, by the white arrow, is the place where Main Street "crossed" Market Street at the center of Kilsyth

The regular military unit called the Hussars from Perth arrived in Kilsyth on the morning of April 4 and joined the Stirlingshire Yeomen Kilsyth contingent at the Kilsyth Inn. Archibald records: **"Although young at the time, I still remember the shrill sound of my brother William's glass bugle [the biography says "glass" but it should be "brass"] when it sounded the turnout call at midnight at the Cross of Kilsyth two houses from ours."** [The Cross of Kilsyth is the intersection of High (or Main) Street and Market Street in the center of town just steps from the Market Place.] **"The sound of doors opening and shutting along the street, the bugle call, the din that grew louder and louder as company after company went by, made up a night not soon to be forgotten."**

The evidence that suggests that the Gardner tavern was indeed the Kilsyth Inn is that Robert Gardner's establishment was located in the center of town, two houses from the Kilsyth Cross, and the fact that William was readily available at midnight to blow his bugle. On the evening of April 4, 1820, about midnight, Captain Davidson summoned William to sound the call to arms for the Stirlingshire Yeomen and the regular army troops stationed in town. William would have had no choice in the matter. Although Robert and William Gardner probably did not know the details of the military plan, they surely knew in a broader sense what was occurring. The troops were informed about the movements of the insurrectionists and 16 yeomen cavalry and 16 regular cavalry set out to intercept the small rebel group on the morning of April 5.

Archibald records that **“In a pitched battle that followed, the radicals were defeated.”** The battle of Bonnymuir was between well-armed and trained cavalymen and a small group of poorly armed weavers and tailors (one had bullets that did not even fit the gun he carried). Nevertheless, the protestors fought back which resulted in casualties on both sides. It was no surprise, however, that the military won the “battle.” But now these protesters had committed an act of treason. The leaders, John Baird and Andrew Hardie, were arrested and 18 total protesters were taken on April 5 as prisoners to Stirling Castle, which was then a major army outpost. Others were arrested subsequent to that date, with arrests continuing for what may have been several days or weeks. The total number of prisoners taken to Stirling Castle appears to be 47. Although the protest had been seething for months, the insurrection was quickly crushed.

It would seem that William’s blast on the bugle, to call out the regular and Yeomen troops to intercept and stop the protesters, was his primary and only contribution to the night’s events as he was not arrested. It appears that William Gardner and his father Robert must certainly have been aware of what was transpiring in Glasgow and throughout the Scottish countryside, but did not actively oppose British rule and took no part in the rebellion, which must have made Robert Gardner’s subsequent arrest and imprisonment especially bitter.

Archibald continues:

“The English government took active measures to uproot the insurrection. Jails and castles were crowded with prisoners, and many honest folk were carried away to prison who had had no hand in the affair. This was the case with father. Because of information given thru spite, the factor (property manager) of the town, whose great pride was hurt at being defeated in a law suit by my father, worked out his vengeance by reporting him a rebel. Father was taken from his business and imprisoned in Stirling Castle until the judges should arrive to try him. They came in nine weeks.”

[Captain John James Davidson, leader of the Yeomen in Kilsyth who lived in Edinburgh, likely served as the town factor then and previously, and was possibly the man that Robert Gardner had a dispute with and subsequently won a lawsuit against. It seems likely that Captain Davidson had Robert Gardner arrested out of spite. It is somewhat ironic that Robert Gardner was accused of being part of the insurrection and imprisoned when it was the British sympathizers and soldiers who stayed at his inn on that fateful night.]



The ancient cemetery in Kilsyth, where one of Robert and Margaret Gardner's daughters is buried



Sterling Castle was an impenetrable fortress

Robert Gardner and his family would have known the town of Stirling. They would have been acquainted with the impregnable castle fortress set high on the steep, craggy cliffs overlooking the plains of Scotland. It was said, "Hold Stirling and you control the whole country." The current castle dates from the late 14th to 16th century. At this time in the history of Stirling Castle, no royalty lived at the castle and it had become a garrison for the British army. The great palace, once opulent and ornate with its five great fireplaces and massive rooms, had been turned into living quarters for the soldiers and stables for the horses. Therefore, a large military presence stood ready at Stirling Castle to be called into service and it was certainly a good place for political prisoners arrested for treason. It was here that Robert Gardner was delivered after English soldiers arrived at his business to arrest him. Stirling is only about 12 miles from Kilsyth but it was no less than a world away for Robert.

If you enter Stirling Castle through the great stone archway and abruptly turn left toward the palace, you will immediately see an archway on the ground level on the far left side of the building. Go through the door underneath the archway into a narrow tunnel-like passageway. Robert Gardner was crowded along with many other prisoners into tiny cells located off either side of this dark tunnel directly beneath the palace. These cells were also dark--no windows--and were, no doubt, cold, damp, musty and miserable in April. The living conditions, to say the least, were



The Castle's stone archway entrance

deplorable. For nine long weeks, Robert languished there as a prisoner, powerless to help himself. He surely felt alone and isolated, disheartened and discouraged, and fearful and full of dread as the days passed by and he awaited his fate. I like to think that hope still stirred in his heart and he held on tightly to the faith of his fathers in a God that was watching over him.



The doorway to the tunnel leading to the jail cells is located to the right of the staircase



The tunnel door



Tunnel underneath the Royal Palace where the jail cells were located in Sterling Castle

At home in Kilsyth, Robert Gardner's wife, Margaret Calendar Gardner, had five children to look after: William, 17; Mary, 13; Janet, 8; Archibald, 6; and Robert, about a year old. She must have been terrified at this turn of events, yet she had to move forward to earn a living by keeping the tavern open and operating the Garrell Mill with the help of William. The older children, who clearly understood the situation, surely supported their mother in any way they could with their father away, but they too must have struggled with the thoughts of what might be. As evidenced by other events in her life, Margaret was a courageous and determined woman who possessed great faith. If prisoners were allowed to have visitors, I am sure Margaret would have been there; if they were allowed to hire counsel, I am sure Margaret would have done it. I am certain that Margaret was doing everything she could think of to help secure Robert's freedom, yet she too must have felt helpless as she watched events unfold. These were dark days and both she and Robert had to face the possibility that he would not leave Stirling alive.

The British legal system at that time required that an indictment be issued by a Grand Jury who would interview witnesses to determine if there was enough evidence to bind the defendant over for trial. The Grand Jury was provided with a Bill of Indictment by prosecutors stating the crimes for which the indictment was sought and listing on the back the witnesses who could testify of the defendants' illegal actions. Those accused in the "Insurrection of 1820" were to be charged with high treason or misprision of treason (knowing of treasonous acts but not reporting them to the government). They were likely attempting to charge Robert Gardner with misprision of treason if they could not find anyone to testify of his involvement in an overt act of treason.

The process of preparing Bills of Indictment, including locating and interviewing potential witnesses by prosecutors, would have taken some time. Archibald Gardner states that from the time of his arrest until he was released from imprisonment at Stirling Castle was nine weeks. During this nine-week period, it appears that prosecutors sought for witnesses against Robert Gardner, but none were found to list on the back of a Bill of Indictment to present to the Grand Jury. It was at this point that Robert Gardner's fortunes improved and he was ultimately released. The Grand Jury sat on July 23, 1820, and after hearing witnesses, issued indictments against all the men arrested at Bonnymuir. By then Robert Gardner was home and his name does not appear among those individuals who were brought before the Grand Jury and no indictment was ever issued against him, although he had been held without bond and without being formally charged for more than two months in Stirling Castle. Robert Gardner was imprisoned but never charged. He was arrested for treason but never brought before the court.

The identified leaders of the "Radical War of 1820" were tried at Tolbooth, a large stone building just a short distance down the hill from Stirling Castle on Broad Street. The English leaders were afraid to try these men in Glasgow where they had much more public support.



Tolbooth, located on Broadstreet, in Stirling

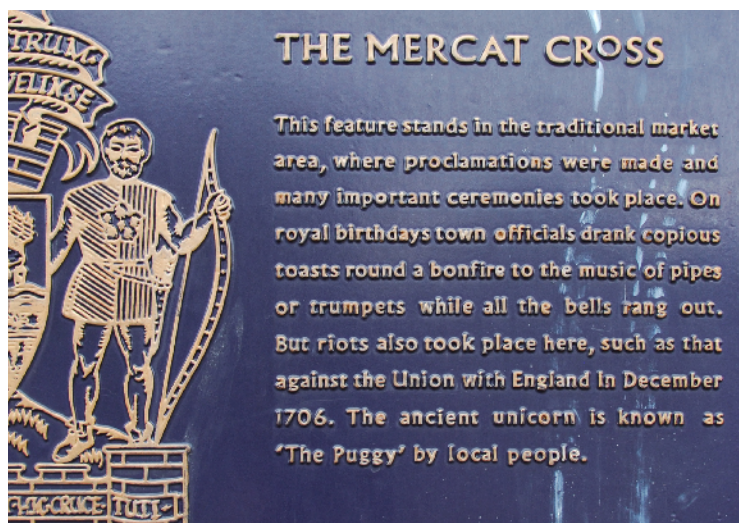
Tolbooth was built in 1705 as Stirling's administrative center. A courthouse and jail were added early in the following century. Andrew Hardie and John Beard, weavers by profession, were tried and found guilty of treason at Tolbooth, hanged, and then beheaded. At least 2,000 observers (some say 6,000), including over 1,300 soldiers from Stirling Castle, witnessed this public execution at the Mercat Cross on Broad Street, a stone column topped with a unicorn that was usually surrounded by a bustling market.

In Archibald Gardner's words: **"Beard and Hardie were tried, hanged and beheaded, and a great many rebels were banished to Botany Bay."** Apparently only one of those banished to Botany Bay in Australia ever returned to Scotland. Hardie and Beard, who were convicted as traitors to their country, were buried in a nearby churchyard in unmarked graves. Lime was added to their graves so that the bodies would decompose rapidly and could not later be recovered.

It is more than interesting to note that in 1835, the convictions of all of those found guilty of treason in the "Insurrection of 1820" were reversed based upon the involvement of English spies who had in fact incited most of the anti-government actions. The bodies of Hardie and Beard were exhumed from the unmarked graves in Stirling and taken to their hometown of Glasgow for reburial. The bodies had so decomposed in 15 years that there was nothing to fill the coffins. Fearing the public's response, the coffins were weighted with rocks and transported to Glasgow with honors where the rock-filled coffins were reburied.



The Mercat Cross is located across the street from Tolbooth





Beautiful Burn Green in the center of Kilsyth

“Father was released as no one appeared to testify against him.” Robert Gardner, the innkeeper, who had been swept up in the tide of retribution following Bonnymuir, was finally allowed to go home and see his family again. How many others were allowed to return to their homes is unknown, but it was certainly a day of rejoicing for Margaret and her children and the whole town of Kilsyth. Archibald Gardner recalls, **“But a wee lad, I remember the day he came home. Crowds of people went to greet him. Mother took me by the hand, and we met him on the Burn’s Green outside of town.”** “Burn” means stream. Burn’s Green is not far from Kilsyth Cross and, as expected, a stream runs through this piece of fertile field covered with lush grass.

Burn's Green was the site of much rejoicing and thanksgiving for the Gardner family that day. Robert had escaped imprisonment, banishment, and death but never again did he want to find himself in such circumstances which had caused untold grief to his loved ones and such awful misery and uncertainty in his life. Never again did he want to find himself unjustly imprisoned in a place where he had few rights and no recourse. And the Lord had other plans for Robert Gardner. Robert decided to leave the land of his fathers and he set his gaze on the distant shores of Canada—a place of opportunity, of freedom, of hope—and a place, unbeknownst to Robert Gardner, where his family would find the Mormon missionaries and the Restoration.

Robert Gardner left Scotland by 1822, accompanied by his oldest son William and his oldest daughter Mary, and his wife and the three younger children, Janet, Archibald and Robert, followed him to Canada in 1823. It is interesting to note that there are newspaper advertisements in 1824 and 1825 in Edinburgh newspapers advertising the Kilsyth Inn for lease.

A NOTE ABOUT SOURCES

Neither I nor my husband, Robert Grow, are historians and no effort has been made to tell the full story of the “Insurrection of 1820.” The story is obviously much more complicated and complex than we can convey in this brief account which is simply intended to put Archibald Gardner’s story about his father Robert Gardner and his brother William Gardner into the context of their times. The story occurred just as Archibald described it and my husband and I have used many sources available in print and on the Internet (listed below) to reach our conclusions.

As Robert and I visited Stirling Castle, we wondered about the location of the prison cells at the castle. (When my sisters, Mary Lou Broadhead and Cynthia Gaufin, and I were there in 2008, we were told that the prison cells were likely in a row of stone buildings just below the castle where the gun powder was stored.) Robert and I were told by a guide at the castle that no prisoners had ever been kept at Stirling Castle, which we knew was not the case. Robert kept asking the staff at the castle for information until we were referred to an older historian named Brian Gibson, who was working in the tapestry weaving exhibition area (another area where we had previously thought that the prison cells might have been located). To our delight, Mr. Gibson knew all about the “insurrection” of 1820, and had just described it as part of an historical presentation at the castle in 2013 entitled “Bloody Stirling.” He also knew exactly where the prison cells were located and directed us to the tunnel under the palace where there are now rooms with exhibits or places where children can experiment with music, etc. Most, but not all, of the small prison cells have been enlarged into rooms, some with windows. There were many prison cells there during 1820 but today only two can be seen in their original state. The cells were very small, cramped, stone enclosures, certainly designed to break a man’s body and spirit.

Mr. Gibson recounted to us a short version of the story of the Insurrection of 1820, indicating that this was no insurrection but the English government clamping down violently on a protest movement that they did not want to see grow and reach Edinburgh, the English seat of government in Scotland. He also told us that English government provocateurs were definitely involved in energizing the populace for this “fight”. Mr. Gibson told us that the Smith Museum on Dumbarton Street in Stirling has the bloody coat worn by one of the leaders who was executed as well as the axe used in the beheadings. He also told us that his wife works at the museum and we should stop by for a visit. Since our time was limited, we decided to find Tolbooth and Mercat Cross where the rest of the story occurred. Thanks again to my husband Robert Grow for not giving up until he found the location of the prison cells, Tolbooth and Mercat Cross, and for reading about the legal proceedings on the Internet for hours.

SOURCES:

1. *The Life of Archibald Gardner*, by Delilah Gardner Hughes, 1939.
2. *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820*, by Peter Berresford Ellis and Seumas Mac A’Ghobhainn, December 1970.
3. *Weavers, Miners and the Open Book: A History of Kilsyth*, by James Hutchison, 1986.
4. *Trials for High Treason in Scotland under a Special Commission held at Stirling, Glasgow, Dumbarton, Paisley, and Ayr, in the year 1820*, in three volumes; taken in short hand by Charles John Green. Volume 1 contains the Bonnymuir trial. All three volumes, which contain an account of all the trials across Scotland in 1820 related to the insurrection, can be found online in archive.org, [google books](http://google.com/books), or on openlibrary.org.
5. Conversation with Mr. Brian Gibson, historian at Stirling Castle, Scotland, August 2014.